# Depot Town Rag

Volume 22, Number 6

August 2010

An old growth issue

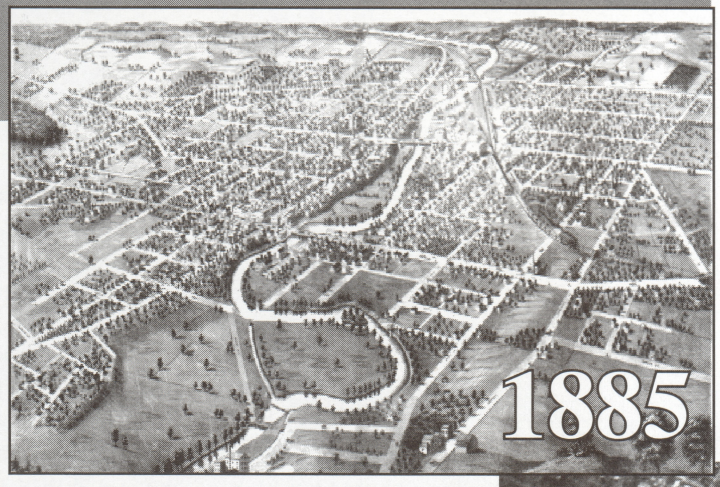
100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198


## 125 years of greening the town

Fresh Flowers

"After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much, so you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers."
*-Veronica A Shoffstall*




## We're still Garden City

In old and new Ypsilanti, our topography remains essentially the same. Many houses still stand, and some open meadows are now parking lots, but the trees and the politicians are more mature. City planners stopped by to make some of the penetrator streets into one-way thoroughfares—many of them leading out of town—and that wasn't all bad; less traffic helped to preserve many of our great old neighborhoods.

Ypsilanti has a preservation ordinance and we understand that history is much more than wealthy people and their big houses. We celebrate streets and alleys, too ...even our barns and gardens.

## This is one big garden community

Once the early pioneers knocked down all the trees to build their houses, they started planting new ones. Today, the young trees in the 1885 bird's-eye view of Ypsilanti reach across the streets and offer the kind of shade newer communities only dream of.

In pre-Google days, itinerant artists toured the country, offering aerial perspectives on the local progress to date. Working with maps from City Hall, artisans created aerial perspectives of the town that left residents wondering what it was like to be able to fly over their back yards and see their laundry waving in the breeze.

Five years later, another artist offered up the same service to Ypsilanti, this time adding sooty black smoke rising from tall chimneys to denote the town's progress. Fewer gardens were visible.

Copies of both aerial perspectives are available at the Ypsilanti

*Today's view of our garden is done from a satellite circling the planet. GoogleEarth shows every back yard on the planet and six-year-olds can find anything they are looking for without having to leave the house.*

*Most of the crew from Energy Outlet and Energy Coalition*

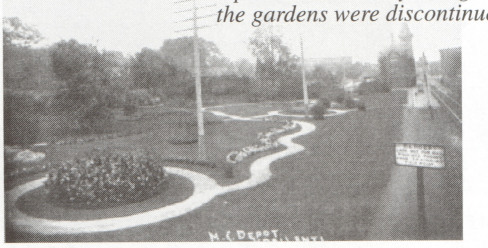
## Can historic buildings get "green" too?

When you think of a "green" building, examples that come to mind may include futuristic looking or solar panel clad buildings. However, that's not always the case. There's a saying in the green building movement: "the greenest building is the one that's already built." Historic buildings already have one of the greatest resources of all, embodied energy. Simply put, embodied energy represents all the energy consumed by all of the processes associated with the production of a building. So keeping and maintaining what's already here is "green."

So how is Ypsi keeping and maintaining its historic buildings? One way is through Rebuild Ypsilanti. You've probably seen this name on the Cross Street mural at the Clean Energy Coalition's offices. Rebuild Ypsilanti is a program run by CEC that helps commercial, government, and apartment building owners reduce their energy costs while maintaining the integrity of their historic buildings. According to Joshua Brugeman, Rebuild Ypsilanti project manager, "it's completely possible to *[continued overleaf]*

# North parking lot recalls a decade of decadence at our historic depot gardens site

*The north-side parking lot (off Maple Street, at the depot), was little more than a weed lot when then-City Assessor Carole Clare took these pix in 19??, just as the DDA was considering installing a parking lot there.*



*The 1890's MCRR gardens across the state were prepared in greenhouses at Ypsilanti. The larger of three greenhouses was 111 feet long. All four were replaced in 1901 by one greenhouse. Use of the greenhouse continued until the gardens were discontinued. It was finally razed in 1959 or 1960.*

*In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the same space was the location of the famed MCRR gardens. The sign at the tracks' edge reads, "DANGER Look out for mail pouches thrown from trains at this point."*

*Greenhouse built just north of the MCRR depot. The heat plant at the far end also heated the Freighthouse across the tracks.*

*The "Depot Flower Shop" sign still stands on E. Michigan Ave, a carry-over from florists who occupied the greenhouse at the depot.*

## Historic & green?

*[continued from page one]*

have an historic building and a 'green' building at the same time."

Some of the "green" strategies the CEC used in its own historic offices include: an energy audit to identify potential energy savings, foam insulation injected into all the outer walls, weather stripping all the doors and windows, reusing existing lumber for remodeling, installing energy-efficient light bulbs, upgrading the furnace to a 95% energy efficient model, installing low-flow fixtures, and lots more.

All of these building upgrades help to improve Ypsi's beloved historic buildings. Plus, the available incentives and tax credits make these improvements more affordable than ever.

If you'd like to see our offices in person, stop by CEC's Energy Outlet (Monday - Friday 12-5) at 44 East Cross next to Café Luwak. There you will find information, products, and support to help you make Ypsi's historic buildings even greener.

*-Deb Heed, Energy Outlet*

# A record of wretched horiticultural hoopla

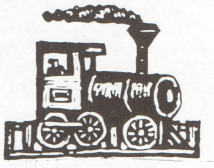
John Laidlaw, MCRR Depot gardener and horiticulturalist, also made displays at Prospect Park and the Normal Gymnasium near the Water Tower, but his major works were at the depot. He was known more for his energy level than his sense of design and restraint.

**Highlights of John Laidlaw's floral displays at the Ypsi depot:**

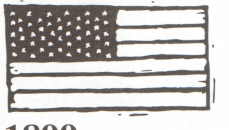
**1892**
Masonic emblems

**1893**
Floral eagle with flags of US, England, Germany, and France on a Roman Army shield

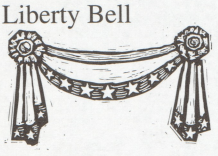
**1894**
MCRR locomotive and cars



**1895**
Niagara Falls with MCRR train crossing bridge



**1896**
Symbols of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine and the Liberty Bell



**1897**
Log cabin, Abe Lincoln, et al.

**1898**
The battleship Maine (Remember?)

**1899**
Monument with even more Masonic emblems, shield of Michigan, crossed US and English flags, USN emblem with miniature battleship Maine (again!)

*[Disclaimer: Symbols are not exact replicas, but taken from contemporary descriptive accounts of our goofy floral displays]*

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# Expect 150-year-old buildings to GREEN-UP too!

## Can "old" go green too?

"Old is the new green!" shouts the cover of the March/April *Preservation* magazine. James H. Schwartz, Editor in Chief, says, "Old isn't obsolete, it's versatile! Every month reporters and editors at *Preservation* document historic structures with extraordinary green potential. Why replace them? Why waste the time, money, and energy when what already exists is infinitely adaptable?"

In his President's notes column of that same slicker, Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, says he is convinced, for example, "that incentives should be based on actual performance and informed by an energy audit, since product-based incentives could lead owners to employ products and techniques harmful to older and historic buildings."

Their special feature in this issue of *Preservation* sounds a lot like the sermons preached right here in Depot Town at the Energy Outlet (44 E. Cross St., 483-9000):

## The cost of going green

You know that going green is good for the environment. But how much will it cost—and how long will it take to recover the dollars you invest?

This *Preservation* [magazine] guide lists average costs of energy-saving features easily integrated into old or new homes of about 2,500 square feet. Some solutions shown qualify for tax credits, particularly if installed before December 31.

To determine what you need to do now—and exactly how much you're likely to save—start with an energy audit. It's a green investment you can afford to make.

### Energy Audit

**Cost: $0-$500**
**Annual Savings: $440-$1100**
**Payback: year/less**
*Projected savings generated by audit-recommended improvements to average single-family home up to 3000 square feet, with annual energy bills of approximately $2200.*

### Duct Sealing

**Cost: $1350**
**Annual Savings: $250**
**Payback: 5.4 years**
*Based on professionally inspected, repaired, and insulated ductwork. Most heating and cooling equipment contractors repair ductwork.*

### Insulation

**Cost: $2000-$5000**
**Annual Savings: $350**
**Payback: 5.7-14.2 years**
*Based on installation by professional contractor. Estimates vary widely depending upon locality and type of insulation. Avoid materials that can damage historic fabric, such as plaster walls.*

### Storm Windows

**Cost: $2500-$4750**
**Annual Savings: Up to $690**
**Payback: 4-7 years**
*Calculated for average home with 25 windows at cost of $100 to $200 per window. Make sure windows are as tight as possible and evaluate whether exterior or interior storms make sense. The National Trust strongly recommends restoring old windows instead of replacing them.*

### Tankless Water Heater

**Cost: $1489**
**Annual Savings: $175**
**Payback: 8.5 years**
*Calculated for a family of four using a Bosch AquaStar 7.2-gpm tankless heater, which can supply two or three major applications at the same time. To improve standard water heaters and reduce heat loss, add insulation*

### Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs

**Cost: $136**
**Annual Savings: $200**
**Payback: 8 months**
*Based on 40 bulbs illuminated for three hours each day, the average U.S. residential number and usage. CFL lifetime calculated at 6000 hours.*

### Water-Saving Toilet

**Cost: $299**
**Annual Savings: $90**
**Payback: 3.3 years**
*Based on a Kohler WaterSense toilet and water usage for a family of four. Some local utilities offer cash incentives to customers who replace older toilets.*

### Ceiling Fan

**Cost: $80**
**Annual Savings: $10**
**Payback: 8 years**
*Based on estimated savings if 52-inch Harbor Breeze Calera fan with one light is used only when room is occupied. Ceiling fans lower perceived temperature in summer, lessening reliance on air conditioning and saving energy. In winter, fans draw warm air down from the ceiling, saving on heating costs.*

### Energy-Saving Refrigerator

**Cost: $729**
**Annual Savings: $90**
**Payback: 8.1 years**
*Based on a GE Energy Star 18.2-cubic-foot refrigerator-freezer, replacing a 1990 refrigerator-freezer.*

### Caulk

**Cost: $5-$250**
**Annual Savings: Up to $250**
**Payback: year/less**
*Based on projected savings generated by caulking cracks, gaps, and joints.*

*SOURCE: Lindsey M. Roberts, National Trust for Historic Preservation*

For information about recycling everything from appliances to light bulbs go to earth911.com


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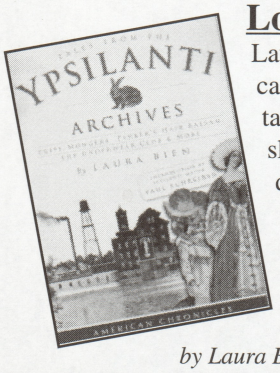



## Local lore well done

Laura Bien has emerged from the archives of the Ypsilanti Historical Society on N. Huron Street with a colorful package of tasty tales of Ypsilanti's past. Combined with her mellifluous writing skills and warm love affair with language, Bien's fifty nifty anecdotes capture the spirit Ypsilantians have had for this old town throughout the years. *Tales From the Ypsilanti Archives* is now available in bookstores and at the Historical Museum.

From ***Tales From the Ypsilanti Archives: Tripe-Mongers, Parker's Hair Balsam, The Underwear Club & More…***

*by Laura Bien, 157 pp, paperback, The History Press, 2010, $19.99*

### From Part II, Bad Times

# Locavores in 1930s Ypsilanti

Before locavorism became fashionable for those rich enough to choose their foods, it was the default position of the poor. In 1932, property owners all over Ypsilanti responded to an appeal by local social worker Inez Graves and donated vacant lots for community food gardens." Conditions were desperate. The American Legion bought surplus army uniforms to give to the poor for everyday clothing. The city accepted tons of government flour—several times. Ypsilanti also allowed the cutting of trees by unemployed men "who can burn wood in their home stoves," noted the *Ypsilanti Daily Press*.

As city trees came down, tomatoes, peppers and beans were coming up. Ypsilanti landowners responded to the *Press*'s call for tillable ground, but demand outstripped supply. "Calls for Garden Plots Exceed Number Listed," noted an April 1, 1932 *Ypsilanti Daily Press* headline. The paper asked for more lots within the city limits, since many families didn't have a car.

Five days later, the *Press* repeated, "More Lots for Gardens Needed to Meet Demand," though over one hundred lots were already being tilled. "Guy Comstock has listed lot 165, Ainsworth Park, and Mrs. Philip Santure, 413 Ferris St., has three lots on Miles St., next to Wolfs' which are available."

As the new sprouts poked up on the plots, the police issued a stern warning "that owners of chickens must keep them confined, or face possible arrest and conviction on charges of maintaining a nuisance," according to the April 7, 1932 *Press*. The paper quoted Officer Ernest Maddux: "Gardens and bulbs are beginning to come up, and chickens are doing damage. Several people have been warned, but if the warning is not heeded, action will follow."

Throughout that April, property owners continued to donate lots, and demand continued to exceed available land. The sight of city plows digging vacant lots and residents hoeing and planting them became commonplace. Need grew so great that at least one resident offered her own backyard: "Mrs. M.J. Davis, 710 W. Michigan Ave., has offered the use of the lot at the rear of her home," said the April 11, 1932 *Press*.

The civic spirit evident in such generosity reappeared in the fall, when groups all over town volunteered help to can produce. Church, school and neighborhood groups canned bushels of fruits and vegetables and crushed a large crop of sorghum for a sugar substitute. The sorghum had been grown in the schoolyard of Harriet School (now Perry Child Development Center).

Hundreds of Ypsilantians opened jars of peaches, beans and tomatoes well into the winter. For some people, on some nights, it was the only bowl of food on the table.

Many families had shortages in Depression-era Ypsilanti. But as the gardening effort showed, one thing the town didn't lack was generosity among neighbors.

## In the next *Rag*:

Depot Town is Dog Town. Meet the pups who keep the neighborhood smiling and talking babytalk

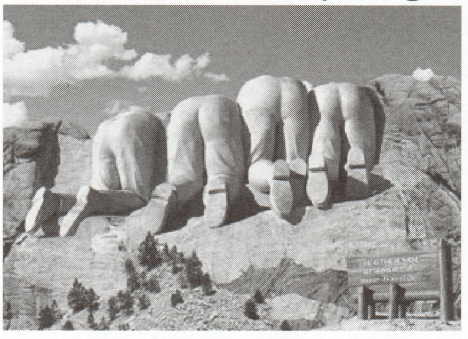
# Depot Town Rag

**"All the news that fits, we print"**
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
**To the editor:**
thomasdodd@comcast.net


## The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Michelle Shankwiler, Vice President
Ruth Ann Jamnick, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President
Website: www.depottown.org
**DTA meets** at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street.

## Point of view is everything



*Anyone who adores those plywood lawn art cut-outs of a woman pulling weeds will certainly appreciate the "Canadian Side" of Mt. Rushmore.*

# Can you dig it?

"My green thumb came only as a result of the mistakes I made while learning to see things from the plant's point of view."

*-H. Fred Dale*

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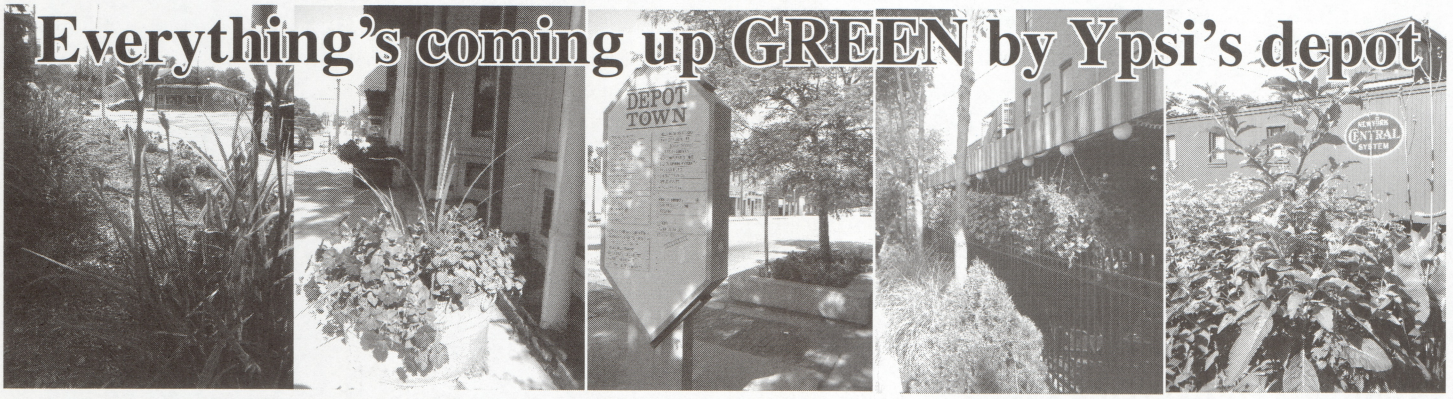
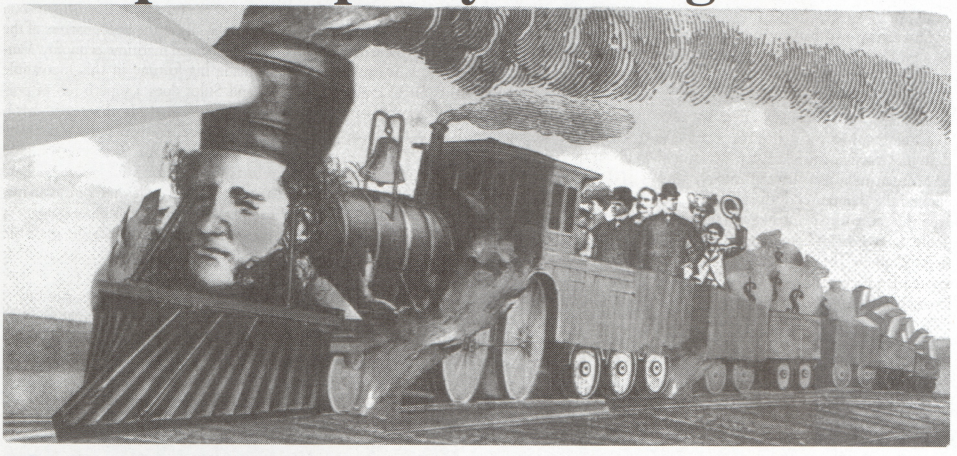
# Everything's coming up GREEN by Ypsi's depot




*Verdure everywhere: hanging baskets, flower beds, pots, and tubs, thanks to those who plant and maintain the neighborhood's many garden spots.*

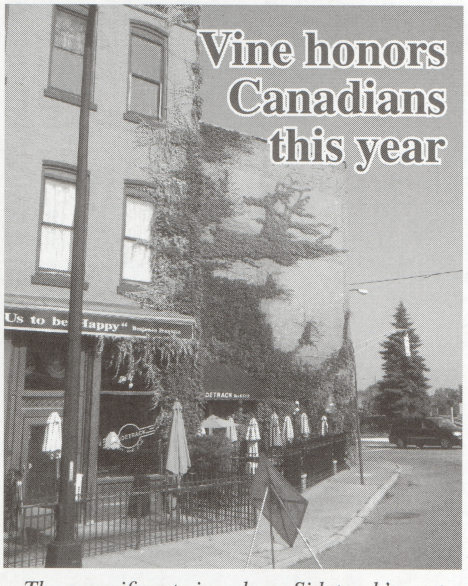
## Will the Robber Barons return and trample our pretty flower gardens?



## Probably not

When the 19th century gardens flourished at the MCRR depot, Ypsilanti's own "barons" inhabited the big homes on N. Huron Street and enjoyed carefully cultivated gardens in their back yards—now Riverside Park. Daniel S. Quirk, owner of the paper mill, the bank, and other local enterprises, was shown in a popular cartoon of the day as just a humble citizen working in his vegetable patch out behind what is now called Old Town Hall.

**If that commuter train ever starts stopping here again,** can we trust all those railroad riders who will soon be stopping here to tromp down the sidewalks at the depot to not kick over the lovely planters and pots in front of our shops? Might they see our tiny gardens as impedimentia to their busy routes of commerce and trade? Will they even notice our hospitality and welcoming smiles? Might these itinerants be realized to be vandals while at this little stop on their way from Ann Arbor to Metro Airport, Dearborn, and Detroit to wreak havoc upon the larger world of mercenary goals? We'll see.




*The magnificent vine above Sidetrack's east patio honors Canada's east coast where the St. Lawrence River delta meets the Atlantic*

## Just how does our garden grow?

*Mary, Mary. quite contrary,*
*how does your garden grow?*
*With silver bells and cockle shells*
*and pretty maids all in a row.*

The Mary from the nursery rhyme was Mary Tudor—Bloody Mary—the daughter of King Henry VIII. She was a staunch Catholic and the garden in this sweet rhyme alludes to graveyards which increased in size with those who dared to adhere to the Protestant faith - Protestant martyrs.

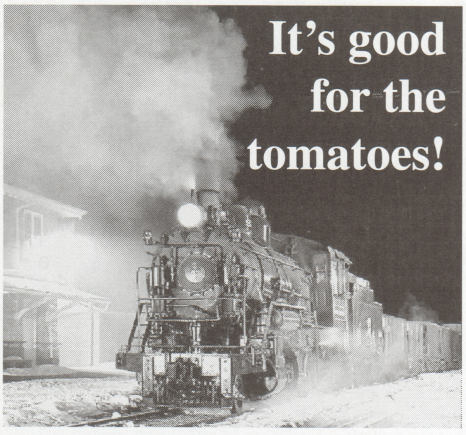
The silver bells and cockle shells were colloquialisms for instruments of torture. The 'silver bells' were thumbscrews which crushed the thumb by tightening a screw. 'Cockleshells' were instruments of torture which were attached to the genitals!

The 'maids' were a device to behead people called the Maiden.

### Our Depot Town gardens are much simpler

Whether the garden is a pot of flowers, a window box, or a cultivated plot next to the sidewalk, the rewards for such effort are far different than in the days of Bloody Mary. Flowers now bring a pause and a smile. Digging and weeding and watering can seem a thankless torture—until you see some thoughtful passer-by "stop and smell the roses"—or daisies or marigolds or whatever.

Stop in to the next shop you see with flowers out in front and let the folks know their effort is much appreciated by our clientele. Thanks to all those who have helped to make ours a GREEN neighborhood, whether it be forty acres for the Market or just a small barrel of posies by the portal.




Country cousin gardeners may find it difficult to believe, but tomato plants thrive alongside the railroad tracks. Metallic vibrations and violent shaking seem to stimulate the vines and encourage growth. Tomato plants in Depot Town have grown to giant sizes in what appears to be a soil made up of mostly coal dust, cinders and ash left over from the days of steam engines rumbling through the neighborhood. Tomatoes planted next to chain link fences seem to enjoy their metallic vibration.

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# RAGTIME Coming events

**August 6 & 7**
**Michigan Roots Jamboree**
*Riverside Park*

**Through September 9**
*Thursday evenings 5-9 (unless it rains)*
**Depot Town Cruise Nights**
*E. Cross Street*

**Tuesday nights as long as we can stand it**
**Motorcycle Mania**
*E. Cross Street*

**August 20, 21, 22**
**Ypsilanti Heritage Festival**
*Riverside Park, Frog Island, Depot Town*
*Info: www.ypsilantiheritagefestival.com*

**Saturday, August 28**
**Annual Firetruck Muster**
*Michigan Firehouse Museum*

**Sunday, October 3**
**SEMI Chapter Antique Truck Show**
*Riverside Park*

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## An early Ypsi PRIDE Day

*Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives*

The 1893 Agriculture Class at Ypsilanti High School sets out to plant green stuff around town. Some of their saplings are the proudest trees in the mid-town area today. Thanks to them—and thanks to all who turned out for the 16th annual Ypsilanti PRIDE Day last May. We can see the results of their efforts today!

## It's not too late to plant your garden

"No one flower can ever symbolize this nation. America is a bouquet."
*-William Safire*

"God knows I've done enough crap in my life to grow a few flowers."
*-Dustin Hoffman*

DEPOT TOWN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

## MICHIGAN ROOTS JAMBOREE in Riverside Park

**Friday, August 6**
- Smokestack
- The Macpodz
- ekoostik hookah
- Rootstand
- Tokyo Sexwhale

**Saturday, August 7**
- UltraViolet Hippopotamus
- The Ragbirds
- Nervous but Excited
- Dead Again
- Hullabaloo
- October Babies
- Funktion (MI)